



NEWS RELEASE



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Forest Service
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Forest Employee Helps with Gulf Oil Spill Assessment

Stefani Melvin, Ecosystems Staff Officer for the Salmon-Challis National Forest, recently returned from a two week detail to a Natural Resource Damage Assessment Team on the Gulf of Mexico oil spill in Daphne, Alabama. She developed a plan to assess how much injury has been incurred by wildlife which will translate to damage (in dollars) to be paid by British Petroleum. The money will be used for restoration projects aimed at benefiting those species impacted by the spill.

Melvin's team focused on evaluating injury to transient and non-breeding shorebirds along the Gulf coast in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. She was name-requested for the assignment because of her expertise in shorebird conservation and prior work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Before coming to the Forest Service, and the Salmon-Challis National Forest she was the Shorebird Conservation Coordinator for USFWS Region 4, which includes most of the area being affected by the oil spill.

The work included 12 hour days "keeping the plan moving forward with writing and lots of conference calls coordinating with the National Park Service, USFWS, conservation agencies in five states, and other technical experts to assess the injuries to shorebirds over such a wide area." Melvin said she only got to see some of the damage on one day when she visited a beach in Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge where efforts were underway to relocate sea turtle nests from oil affected areas to beaches in Florida that have not been affected by the spill.

"It's just as well I didn't see more of the damage first hand, I needed to keep focused on the shorebird project." Melvin said. "We got daily updates and it was distressing enough to be working on a project where the chief measurements were body counts of birds killed or numbers of live oiled birds."

The assessment Melvin worked on was just one of seven programs underway to determine injuries to the bird community. Other assessment programs are in place for seabirds, colonial waterbirds, marsh birds, breeding shorebirds, wintering waterfowl, and raptors.

When she returned to work in Salmon last week she said, “I was glad I could help out and I’m happy to be home where I can deal with other issues such as grazing and threatened and endangered fish.”